Phila Inquirer Sunday

In passing . . .

Specter knuckles under

Sen. Arlen Specter chose his party over his principles yesterday when the U.S. Senate fell one vote — *one vote!* — short of halting a Republican filibuster preventing a vote on President Clinton's plan for a national service program. Mr. Specter fell right in line, supporting the filibuster, and, in effect, voting against a bill he *himself* co-sponsored.

Despite a long speech on the Senate floor proclaiming his concern over the cost of the scaled-back program, Mr. Specter leaves us wondering why a moderate Republican like himself, who has shown courage before, decided to cave in this time on popular legislation that provides a way to help teach our kids and fix our cities — and that he supports. We just can't figure out his weaseling out, other than as a willingness to accede to the Republican strategy of perpetuating gridlock at any cost.

Cheers for the three moderate Republicans who voted to end the filibuster: David Durenberger of Minnesota, John Chaffee of Rhode Island and Jim Jeffords of Vermont. Jeers to the senior senator from Pennsylvania, of whom we expected better.

Suppression condoned

Just when we thought some semblance of sanity had returned to the administration at the University of Pennsylvania, we read about a report from its "Public Safety Task Force" criticizing the campus police for having tried (unsuccessfully) to stop students from absconding with the entire press run of the campus newspaper one morning last April.

The task force said police failed to realize that the students who took the newspaper were engaged in a form of protest, not "criminal behavior." But the task force failed to realize that suppressing a newspaper is simply not an acceptable form of protest.

The report then sketches out a scenario the police should have followed that reads like a parody concocted by George Orwell and Jonathan Swift. In it, the police should only have done nothing except to alert "open-expression monitors" to witness the unlawful taking of the paper.

University spokespersons rush to reassure anyone who asks that the task force's report is not the opinion of the university, nor a verdict on what action will be taken against the students. But somehow we are not reassured. What amazes us is that anyone at a university could regard suppressing a newspaper as acceptable behavior.

Editorial Board staff: Mike Leary, associate Editorial Page editor; Philip H. Joyce, Commentary Page editor; John Lubell, assistant Editorial Page editor; Henry Bryan, Russell Cooke, Alexis Moore, Rick Nichols, Douglas Pike and Trudy Rubin, editorial writers; Claude Lewis, columnist; Tony Auth, editorial cartoonist.